



# NORM COLEMAN

UNITED STATES SENATOR • MINNESOTA



## Job #1: Getting Things Done for Minnesota

*by Senator Norm Coleman*

As Minnesota's mayor in Washington, I take very seriously my role as an advocate for the people of Minnesota on local, state, and national issues. To best gauge these interests, I place a high value on listening to local concerns. That's why I am in the process of visiting every Minnesota county by year's end. As a result of these conversations, I have been able to be a voice in Washington for all Minnesotans and worked to address many of our shared concerns this year in Congress.

One of my top concerns is to make sure we honor and provide the best possible care for our military veterans. So I was shocked to learn that almost 600,000 veterans nationwide were eligible for benefits but not receiving them—simply because they didn't know they qualified. To remedy this situation, I introduced the Veterans Benefits Outreach Act, which will require the VA to develop a strategy each year to reach out to veterans who are not receiving the benefits for which they are eligible to make certain we connect the two. Passage of this law earlier this year means all our veterans now have the chance to make an informed decision about the benefits a grateful nation has promised them.

I also successfully helped tackle the problems with our nation's pension system, which threatened the retirement benefits of 20,000 Northwest employees based in Minnesota whose pensions were in jeopardy. I worked with my colleagues to pass legislation that secured the pensions of not only these airline employees and retirees, but everyone in Minnesota and around the nation who relies on a stable pension system.

Another matter of concern, especially for folks in northern Minnesota, has been the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative, which will put significant financial strain on families, businesses and communities near the border. While I certainly support the security goals behind this proposal, the proposed timeframe did not allow enough time to develop and test a cost-effective system that truly protected the border. This fall we succeeded in pushing back the implementation date to June 2009 to ensure plenty of time for affected individuals to obtain the necessary documents and, most importantly, to ensure we have a reliable system in place.

I have also taken numerous steps to reduce our dependence on foreign oil, which is one of the largest threats to our security, freedom, and economy. To begin with, I helped secure \$36 million in funding for the construction of an advanced clean coal gasification plant in northeastern Minnesota. This project will not only benefit the Iron Range environment and economy, but also help the United States meet its energy needs. I also introduced and supported a number of initiatives this year to drastically increase the use of renewable fuels, expand E-85 infrastructure and allow for domestic natural gas and oil exploration in the Outer Continental Shelf. We also began to see the benefits this year of last year's energy bill—signed into law—which included several renewable energy provisions I co-authored. From the renewable fuels standard for ethanol and biodiesel to the wind energy and biodiesel tax credits, Minnesota companies have used these provisions to continue to strengthen their renewable energy programs.

We also have taken a real step forward in combating the production and abuse of methamphetamine that has been plaguing many of our state's rural, as well as urban, areas. The passage of the Combat Meth Act, which keeps the ingredients for meth out of the hands of those who seek to make, sell, and abuse this dangerous drug, is a major step in fighting the meth epidemic.

On the issue of transportation, Congressman Mark Kennedy and I have been working to bring the Northstar Rail Project closer to becoming a reality. This fall I authored an amendment to ensure that Northstar will not be penalized by a new Federal Transit Administration rule change which would have put an end to the project. Not only will Northstar help reduce energy and oil use, it is expected to save Minnesota commuters 900,000 hours annually and generate \$2 to \$3 billion in economic development.

To help Minnesotans deal with high home heating bills in the winter months, I worked tirelessly to secure additional Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) funding. I recognize the importance of keeping 140,000 Minnesota families warm, and worked hard to pass legislation that increased 2006 LIHEAP funding by \$1 billion nationwide, a 35 percent increase for Minnesota.

I also was pleased to be a part of two important judicial confirmations this year. Duluth native and University of St. Thomas law professor Patrick Schiltz was unanimously confirmed as a U.S. District Judge for the District of Minnesota. Judge Samuel Alito was appointed and confirmed to the Supreme Court. We as Minnesotans and as a nation should be proud to have judges of such high caliber on the bench.

This Senate also took real steps to improve our homeland security this year. In fall, we passed port security legislation based in part on the work of my Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, that will take immediate steps to improve port security, as well as establish a pilot program in three foreign seaports to test an integrated radiation scanning system for 100 percent of U.S.-bound containers. I also joined my Senate colleagues in voting for two bills that will help us retain and use the tools necessary to win the War on Terror and protect our citizens -- we voted this year to reauthorize the USA Patriot Act and to implement a statutory military commission structure for Guantanamo Bay detainees. We also made significant progress in enhancing our overall border security by increasing the number of border patrol agents, deploying technologies like unmanned aerial vehicles and sensors along the border, and authorizing additional fencing to be built along our southern border.

We have achieved many important victories for Minnesota and America during this session of Congress, but there is still more to be done. With a new Farm Bill on the horizon, continuing challenges for rural healthcare, and the limitless potential of Minnesota's renewable fuels, I will continue to ensure that your voices are heard loud and clear in Washington, D.C.